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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA RENEWS OFFER OF FREE BROADCAST HOUR TO  
USG

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)  
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(C) KEY POINTS  
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-- Al Jazeera Chairman of the Board Sheikh Hamed bin Thamer Al Thani told Ambassador on February 19 that he continues to believe that providing access to Al Jazeera's airwaves to USG officials is essential to accurately portraying the news to Arabic-speaking audiences.

-- The Sheikh reiterated his willingness to allow the USG a full, free broadcast hour to present its views from Washington or Doha, on any topic, in a format of our choosing.

-- In the week leading up to this meeting with the Sheikh, Al Jazeera conducted interviews with at least four current and former senior USG officials, including the Ambassador, which contained no surprises and were aired in a straightforward manner.

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COMMENTS  
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-- Embassy will also continue conveying to Al Jazeera at all levels that the more professionalism we see on the screen, the more likely it will be that the USG will take it more seriously.

END KEY POINTS AND COMMENTS

11. (C) Sheikh Hamed bin Thamer Al Thani, Chairman of the Board of the Al Jazeera Network, told Ambassador on February 19 that official U.S. voices were essential to Al Jazeera's efforts to present viewers with both sides of issues dominating the daily news. To accurately capture the U.S. position on events in the Middle East, he said, it is critical for Al Jazeera to have access to USG guests who are willing to appear and present their views.

12. (C) In that regard, the Sheikh reiterated an offer made to Ambassador in October 2008 for the USG to present its views on a 9/11 documentary aired by Al Jazeera during a free broadcast hour. Ambassador asked if that offer could be amended to include another topic that the USG may wish to address, such as the Administration's approach to the Muslim world. Sheikh Hamed said the USG could choose any topic, in any format, broadcast from any city with an Al Jazeera bureau, including Washington, London and Doha. The important thing, he stated, was for Arab viewers to hear directly from the United States Government.

13. (C) In this connection, Sheikh Hamed thanked the Ambassador for his February 17 appearance in Arabic on Al Jazeera's 1800GMT news bulletin to convey the USG's views of the agreement signed that day in Doha between the Government

of Sudan and a Darfur rebel movement. He invited Ambassador to appear again at a time and on topics of his choosing.

14. (SBU) In the week leading up to Ambassador's meeting with Sheikh Hamed, at least three other current and former USG officials were interviewed by Al Jazeera, which the officials characterized as straightforward and with no surprises. These included:

-- Congressman Keith Ellison on Al Jazeera Arabic as the "Mid-Day Guest" on the 1330GMT news bulletin, regarding the Administration's relations with the Muslim world;

-- Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Doug Hengel on Al Jazeera Arabic's main daily business news report, regarding energy policy;

-- Former SecState Madeleine Albright on Al Jazeera Arabic and English, regarding the annual U.S.-Islamic World Forum.  
LeBaron